

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

History of the Marine Transportation System Initiative

Secretary Rodney E. Slater has made revitalization of the nation's Marine Transportation System (MTS) a matter of high priority. Recognizing the challenges faced by the marine portion of the nation's transportation system -- an aging infrastructure consisting of inadequate channels and congested intermodal connections -- Secretary Slater set out to find ways to support a safe and environmentally sound world-class waterways system that improves our global competitiveness and national security by improving coordination and cooperation among all stakeholders. By improving coordination and cooperation among all stakeholders in a transportation system characterized by many diverse users, we will be better able to address the marine transportation needs of our nation.

Regional Listening Sessions

The first of these cooperative efforts occurred when the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), in conjunction with other federal agencies, held seven Regional Listening Sessions in port cities across the nation to gather information from users, stakeholders, and the public on what they perceived to be the current state and future needs of the MTS. Cooperating federal entities include the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Railroad Administration, Research and Special Programs Administration, Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation, DOT's Office of Intermodalism, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Minerals Management Service, National Imagery and Mapping Agency, and the Environmental Protection Agency. These agencies, along with the Coast Guard and the Maritime Administration, comprise the MTS National Steering Committee, which provided guidance to an interagency MTS Working Group responsible for developing the seven two-day Regional Listening Sessions.

The first day of each Regional Listening Session was an open forum to hear the views and opinions of the public regarding the current state and future needs of our Marine Transportation System. The format of the second day was a structured focus group featuring a representative cross section from the region's ports, terminals, stevedores, pilots, vessel operators, railroads, truckers, environmental community, and others who were invited to provide their expertise on the current state and future needs of the MTS. A summary of each session of the seven two-day Regional Listening Sessions was placed in the electronic docket for public review and comment. Regional Listening Sessions were held in the following locations:

New Orleans, LA	March 31-April 1, 1998
Oakland, CA	April 14-15, 1998
New York, NY	April 21-22, 1998

Cleveland, OH	April 29-30, 1998
St. Louis, MO	May 5-6, 1998
Charleston, SC	May 13-14, 1998
Portland, OR	May 19-20, 1998

The seven Regional Listening Sessions identified the critical issues affecting the Marine Transportation System in the next millenium. Approximately 2,000 individual comments, covering a wide range of local and national issues were received. It was a challenge to preserve the meaning and character of the original comments and consolidate them into agenda items for the first National Conference on the Marine Transportation System.

The Department of Transportation's strategic goals were used as a guide for organizing the comments from the Regional Listening Sessions. The strategic goals of DOT are:

- ◆ to promote the public health and safety by working toward the elimination of transportation-related deaths, injuries, and property damage;
- ◆ to shape America's future by ensuring a transportation system that is accessible, integrated, efficient, and offers flexibility of choices;
- ◆ to advance America's economic growth and competitiveness domestically and internationally through efficient and flexible transportation;
- ◆ to protect and enhance communities and the natural environment affected by transportation; and,
- ◆ to advance the nation's vital security interests by ensuring that the transportation system is secure and available for defense mobility and that our borders are safe from illegal intrusions.

It was important that the issues represented both national concerns for transportation as a whole, as well as those concerns that were specific to the Marine Transportation System. The issues that were developed for discussion at the National Conference were Safety, Competitiveness, Infrastructure, Environment and Security, the need for a national MTS vision, and a framework for coordination among the numerous public and private sector stakeholders at the local and national levels. These seven issues were the foundation upon which the National Conference agenda was based.

Overview of the National Conference

One hundred forty-four (144) senior leaders from a cross section of the nation's ports, terminals, stevedores, pilots, vessel operators, railroads, truckers, environmental community, and others were invited to participate in two and one-half days of concentrated plenary and breakout sessions. Participants were charged with deliberating the issues and producing recommendations in the form of goals and action items for issue resolution.

In Secretary Slater's opening address, he stated " ... this Conference ... is about the future. It is about our becoming more visionary and vigilant t is an example of common sense government ... where we gather with you, the stakeholders, and we spend a lot more time listening than talking." "You have an ambitious agenda ahead of you. ... The vision statement that comes out of this conference will enable us to move forward with

confidence ... as we put the maritime transportation sector at the center, rather than ... pressed to the sidelines."

Addresses from other distinguished leaders included Admiral James M. Loy, Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard, Mr. Clyde J. Hart, Jr., Maritime Administrator, and Mr. Richard du Moulin, Chairman of The International Association of Independent Tanker Owners (INTERTANKO) and President of Marine Transport Lines. These speakers eloquently stressed the importance of the conference and set the stage for its work.

Prior to the plenary session work, participants watched a multi-media presentation that illustrated current intermodal issues and trends, that set the stage for subsequent discussions on the Draft MTS Vision for 2020 presented by General Russell L. Fuhrman, Director of Civil Works, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The perception by stakeholders and users that the nation is lacking an MTS vision was the foundation for engaging Conference participants in small group work sessions affording them time to come to consensus on what an MTS vision statement should include. The collective results of the work sessions were blended into the draft vision statement that would be reported out on the last day of the Conference.

Later in the afternoon, the conferees separated into five breakout work groups to deal with the issues of Competitiveness, Environment, Infrastructure, Safety and Security. Panels in each of the work groups discussed issues, problems and trends from the panelists' perspectives that stimulated thought-provoking discussions on how best to resolve some of the issues.

The second day of the Conference was spent completing issue group work on recommended goals and implementing actions; working collectively in plenary on a local and national coordination structure for the MTS; and receiving feedback in plenary on the issue groups' recommendations in readiness for presentations to Conference participants and a senior federal leadership panel convened to hear the outcome of the Conference on the final day. The senior leadership report-out panel, led by DOT Secretary Slater, included Deputy Secretary of Commerce, Robert L. Mallet; Under Secretary of Agriculture Michael V. Dunn; Assistant Secretary of the Army, Dr. Joseph W. Westphal; and, Deputy Assistant Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, Ms. Dana Minerva. The resounding consensus of the leadership panel was that the conference was definitely a step in the right direction and in addressing the right issues.

Secretary Slater's remarks included the statement, " ... because of what you have done here at this conference, we are several giant steps ... closer to make sure that the Marine Transportation System is ready as an integral part of our nation's transportation system. We now have the beginning of a powerful vision. ... I think that it is a vision that will command the respect and the attention ... of those who serve in the Executive Branch ... also the Congress.